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15 March 1991

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Ethiopia: Status of Falashas

As the northern insurgents continue to advance toward the Ethiopian capital and the fall of the Mengistu regime looms, Israel and the State Department are increasingly worried about the continued emigration of Ethiopian Falasha Jews to Israel.

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- Non-official Israelis have accused the regime of halting the exodus of the remaining 18,000 Falashas in the Addis Ababa area as part of its campaign for more Israeli military aid. Tel Aviv publicly has denied Ethiopia is seeking more military aid for fear of further angering Mengistu. Before the Ethiopians cut off the Falasha flow to Israel in early March, the emigration level had been averaging about 500-1000 Falashas per month since late last year when Tel Aviv and Addis Ababa agreed on new procedures for the Falashas' departure.
- The collapse of the Mengistu regime probably would make further emigration even more difficult, particularly if such an event is followed by chaos in the capital. Even if there were a smooth transition to a new regime, a government dominated by the rebels probably would be in no rush to expedite the Falasha flow in part to punish Israel for its military support to Mengistu.
- Israel reportedly has offered to underwrite transportation expenses for an emergency evacuation of the Falashas and the Department of Defense has \$15 million to facilitate such an evacuation which can be used for transportation costs and apparently "other measures" to encourage Mengistu to cooperate. Efforts may be underway at State to see how the money can be used to get the Falashas out.

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